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National Identity, Islam and Politics in the Balkan

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1. Introduction[1]

This study aims to assess how national Identity, Islam and politics have evolved historically among Albanians and Bosnian Muslims in Former Yugoslavia.

The complex relationship of the Balkans Muslim populations to religion and politics should be seen in the light of the cultural and religious Ottoman heritage and of the minority political status that they have enjoyed as Muslims since their incorporation into the new Balkan States (Serbia and Montenegro, Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes and late into Yugoslavia). The secularization process which started under the communist regime also played a significant role. These factors help explaining the secular nature of contemporary political movements among Muslim population in the Balkans and among the diasporas in Switzerland.

In order to support these arguments, this paper is divided into three parts. First, we analyze the genesis and building-up of the Albanian and Bosnian Muslim nationalism in former Yugoslavia. We analyze the stages through which these national movements were formed, the building blocks for the national construction and the different political phases through which the Muslim populations were incorporated into Serbia and Montenegro, Serbian, Croatian and Slovenian Kingdom and later into Yugoslavia. We also identify the historical factors explaining why the nationalist movements of Muslim populations in former Yugoslavia have developed different types of relationships in regards with the religion. Secondly, the understanding of these political and religious configurations requires looking at the specificities of Islam in the Balkans and its place among Albanians, Bosnian Muslims and their elite. Finaly, we will explain political and religious changes since the last conflicts in Kosovo (1999), Presevo Valley (2000) and Macedonia (2001). In particular, we look at the temptation of return of religious actors to the public stage and the emergence of new religious and political trends in the Albanian regions.

2. National identity among Muslim populations in the Balkans

Albanians and Bosnian Muslims belong to the largest ethnic groups that were converted to the Muslim religion during the long Ottoman rule in the Balkans. The national movements of Albanians and Bosnian Muslims have emerged belatedly. As notes Aydin Babuna, these populations were identified with the Ottoman state and the representation of this state in their respective regions has contributed to the delay in carrying out their nationalism (Babuna, 2004).

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[1] This thinking is part of my own research and study that I conducted in 2006-2007 with Xavier Bougarel on "Islam and Politics in the Western Balkans"

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Historically, the national awareness of Balkan Muslim populations started from the beginning of the Ottoman Empire's modernization process. For the Albanians, it got stronger during the Tanzîmât reforms (1838-1878) which led to numerous people's uprisings against them (Matkovski, 1985). For the Bosnian Muslims, it got in the period after the Berlin Treaty (1878), respectively during the Austro-Hungarian administration of Bosnia and Herzegovina .

2.1 Albanian nationalism

The Albanian national impetus only started with the Prizren League (in Kosovo) in 1878.[2] A new nationalist rhetoric emerged, giving a new meaning to history and to cultural and ethnic markers.[3] This rhetoric's main characteristics were: an aspiration to create a common history, the building up of a common language and the claim for national identity linked with a territory. This process led to the adoption of Albanian autonomist attitudes, rupture with the Porte and the breaking out of a bloody conflict with the Ottoman power. The Prizren League was itself polarized and torn by identity dilemmas (between East and West) and political contradictions. This was due to the pragmatism adopted by the Albanian elite in a very uncertain geopolitical context, to the depth of Albanians' historical relationships with the Ottoman Empire, to the region's under-development and to divergent expectations towards the separatist outlook. However, the League was a turning point in the process of the raise of Albanian national awareness.

The Prizren League was crushed by the Porte and its figureheads were executed or deported. However, Albanian national revival came just a few years later with a much wider social basis. Albanian nationalism translated into a desire to become independent from the Ottoman power and led to a general armed uprising. This process led to de facto acceptance of the new Albanian political reality by the Ottoman power.

The second Albanian nationalist impetus ended up in Albania's independence in 1912 and in its international recognition at the 1912 London conference. But it also led to the rise of a new Albanian nationalism, the nationalism of those left out of the Albanian state borders. In fact, there were as many people of Albanian language and culture out of Albania's territory as there were inside: in Greece, Macedonia, Kosovo, Serbia and Montenegro. In 1912-13, vast amounts of the Albanian population were integrated into the Serbian and Montenegrin state against their will and in particularly violent conditions (Kennan, 1993; Tucovic, 1914). This process paved the way for a new Albanian nationalism and structured its collective references.

In fact, this form of nationalism existed through all three phases of the incorporation of Kosovo and Macedonia.

In the *first phase* (1912-1918), Albanian nationalism became more active through general revolts against the military power of Serbia (and of Bulgaria between 1915-18). It aimed at joining up the territories of the Albanian cultural areas to those of Albania. This political objective was also due to the repression (attempted ethnocide) of Albanian populations subjected to the Serbian military regime.

The *second phase* (1918-1941) saw the Albanians incorporated into the Serbian, Croatian and Slovenian Kingdom. It was characterized by a policy aiming at altering the ethnic structure of Kosovo and Macedonia through "land reform" and a Serbian settlement process (Roux, 1992; Malcolm, 1998; Verli, 1991; Vickers, 1998). During that time, the only educational institutions that were authorized by the

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[2] On Prizren League, see: (Skendi, 1967; Frashëri, 1997; Malcolm, 1998; Daniel, 2000)
[3] For a conceptual approach of the genesis of the Albanian national movement, see: (Iseni, 2008)

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Serbian regime were religious schools – Islamic or Catholic.[4] In fact, these schools were used as platforms to spread Albanian nationalist ideas until the Second World War (Banac, 1984: 299).

Finally, the *third phase* saw the incorporation of Albanians into the Yugoslav federation in 1945. Policies attempted both to repress and to integrate the non-Slave ethno linguistic community into a federation ruled by Slav populations. In fact, after 15 years of military administration (1945-1966), the Albanian spaces in Kosovo and Macedonia really started to be integrated into the Yugoslav political project. This integrative policy had swift cultural, socio-economic and political results in Kosovo and Macedonia. However, Yugoslavia was going through a structural economic crisis and the Albanian regions were first affected. Thus, in 1981, nationalist and socio-economic demonstrations took place in Kosovo (Horvat, 1988; Mertus, 1999). Albanian nationalism in the 1980's had its roots both in the community's ambiguous political status within the Yugoslav federation, but also in the region's under-development (Roux, 1992: 235-251).

In short, historically, Albanian nationalism in former Yugoslavia was a reaction to strong ethnic discrimination originating in the building up of the nation states of Serbia and Montenegro on exclusive ethno linguistic premises. This helped to raise awareness of an Albanian identity and to promote intra-Albanian ethnic solidarity in former Yugoslavia. This Albanian identity was mainly formed through a nationalist ideology based upon ethnic symbols and exclusive myths. Considering the recent history of Albanians in former Yugoslavia, it is clear that Islamic religious references have been absent from the discourse and political actions of the national and nationalist movement. This is despite the fact that the population is mainly made up of Sunni Muslims and that Islam and Catholicism are important identity markers differentiating them from the Slav populations (Serbian, Macedonian and Montenegrin). This Albanian nationalism particularity contrasts with the history of Bosnian Muslim in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Sandžak.

2.2 Bosnian Muslim nationalism

Concerning the Bosnian Muslims, during the rule of Austria-Hungary in Bosnia and Herzegovina (1878-1914), efforts were focused to create a Bosnian nation founded on the three ethnic-religious communities: Muslim, Orthodox and Catholic. The challenge is well summarized by A. Babuna: « Nor did the nationality policy of the Austro-Hungarian governement, Bošnjastvo (Bosnianism), succeed. Although some Muslim intellectuals called themselves 'Boasniaks' this national identity did not become popular among the Muslims. However, this policy of the Austro-Hungarian government contributed to the cultural and political development of the Bosnian Muslims through the attention paid to their distinctiveness. The Austro-Hungarians allowed the Bosnian Muslims to call their language a Bosnian language until 1907" (Babuna, 2004: 292-293).

Since the breaking up of the Ottoman empire, the Bosnian Muslims felt that, in order to survive as a collective identity, they needed a good relationship with the successive central Yugoslav authorities (Poulton, 1997: 22-23). At times, Islam was a refuge for most of this population, which spoke Serbo-Croatian, but claimed an identity that was distinct from the Orthodox Serbs and the Catholic Croats. This is the reason why the Bosnian Muslims asserted their distinctiveness by rallying around the religious referent. In fact, since the XIX Century this population is the target of identity cooption by the political representatives of Serbs and Croats. These describe it as "Serbian Muslim" or "Croatian

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[4] For example the «King Alexander» madrasa (religious secondary school) in Skopje and the Saint-Catherine religious society (Franciscan) in Pejë-Peć.

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Muslim" and this way they target respectively annexation of Bosnia and Herzegovina to Serbia or Croatia.

After the integration of Bosnia and Herzegovina to the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes (Kingdom SCS), the traditional secular and religious elite of Bosnian Muslims set around the Yugoslav Muslim Organization (JMO, Jugoslovenska Muslimanska Organizacija) that was born in 1920. The JMO advocates the idea of "Yugoslavism" with the aim to protect themselves under Serbian and Croatian assimilationist propaganda. JMO is hostile to Serbian and Croatian nationalism, but also Bosnian, that is to say to the nationalist ideology that Austria-Hungary wanted to promote during his rule in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

In conclusion, it should be remembered that since the disintegration of the Ottoman Empire, the Balkan Muslim populations are in the political position of a minority. Since then, the new political majorities in the new Balkan states subjected them to discrimination and repression. Because of this situation, between 1878-1945, two to three million of Muslims emigrated to Turkey. These waves of migration continued into the 60s.

2.3 Relationship between Islam and politics

Historically, Islam did not play the same role in the national building up of different Muslim populations in the Balkans: the transition from the *millets* to the nation system (in the nineteenth century) took different routes in each ethno linguistic group. The Albanians have left the Islamic religious dimension out of their political claims and religious belonging was relegated to a position of secondary importance. For historical and geopolitical reasons, the Bosnian Muslims have accorded an important place to the Islamic religion in their national Identity, however, they remain largely a secular society.

Regarding the Albanians in former Yugoslavia, they remained very attached to Albanian national and ethnic values. As in Albania, the national feeling as a social bond was formed around the language, not religion. The founding fathers of Albanian nationalism, who were of three or four different faiths, saw religion as a dividing factor in the national endeavor. Religion was set-aside straightaway in the nationalist calls and awareness raising manifestoes, despite the role of Muslim (particularly bektachis) and Christian religious figures (catholic and orthodox). Thus, they insisted on language as the unifying element. This explains the messianic call of one of the founding fathers of Albanian nationalism: « Awake, Albania, it's time to rise, and bind yourselves with brotherly ties, look not to church or mosque for pietism, the faith of Albanians is Albanianism ».

The influence of the Marxist-Leninist inspired nationalist doctrine of Enver Hoxha and its literature, has spread widely into Albanian populated areas of former Yugoslavia. The doctrine contributed to developing a complex relationship of the elites with history and religion. This was the elite that carried out the political demonstrations in Kosovo and Macedonia in 1968 and 1981. The influence of Enver Hoxha's atheist communist nationalism was very powerful among the Kosovar students who were behind these impressive demonstrations.

Socio-political developments in the last few years underscore the minimal role played by Islam among Albanians in former Yugoslavia. The same is true in politics. It is not possible to identify a single religiously-connoted Albanian political group or guerrilla in the recent history of Kosovo,

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Macedonia or the Presevo Valley.[5] Religion is absent from both the political programs and concrete actions. However, the relationships between Islamic institutions and political circles vary also among Albanians in former Yugoslavia.

In Kosovo, Islam and the Kosovo Islamic Community (KIC) remain marginal in political life and among the political and intellectual elites (Iseni, 2005a). From the early 1990s, the KIC aligned itself with the political agenda of the Kosovar political elite and actively mobilized in favor of the independence of Kosovo. Even so, the Kosovar political leadership kept away from this religious institution.[6] In Macedonia, the political and intellectual Albanian elite leans towards the political and cultural western model and secularism.[7] Yet, Macedonia's main Albanian political formations have used the Macedonia Islamic Community in order to gain the support, but also social and political control, of Macedonia's Albanians. Finally, in the Presevo Valley, the Islamic institutions of Presevo, Bujanovac et Medvedje have been used politically, as they have been subjected to divided administrative and religious affiliations between Kosovo and Serbia.

The situation is different for the Bosnian Muslims. For above mentionned reasons, the Islamic religion remained more important in the history of their national Identity.

In the phase that follows the recognition of Bosnian Muslim nation ('Muslims'), there is an "Islamic renaissance" in the Balkans with Center Sarajevo. This wind of liberalization occurs by translating and publishing Islamic literature in local languages thanks to the development of religious education, by building mosques and so on.

A "rediscovery of the history and culture of the Bosnian Muslim" and a "reactivation of links with the Muslim world" accompany this process. This cultural revival and political place in the context of the launch of the movement of Non-Aligned Movement (led by Yugoslav leaders) consists in a large number of Arab countries. The first Summit of the Non-Aligned countries held in Belgrade in 1971. At this time contacts were also renewed between the Muslim populations of the Balkans and the Arab-Muslims.

In Bosnia and Herzegovina, in 1990, an Islamist movement (until than marginal) created the Party of Democratic Action (SDA), which became the main leading party for the Bosnian Muslims. It was well placed at the center of the recomposition of the Bosnian political elites and in 1993, it took the control of their Islamic religious institutions. In the 2000s, this Islamist trend was a gradual process of marginalization (loss influence within the SDA, neutralization of some of its members, etc..) and religious institutions have played a more autonomous role, but no less important in politics.

We still need to understand why Albanians, and to a larger extent Bosnian Muslims, have a secular national identity and maintain cultural relationship with religion, despite most of them are Muslims. This requires going back to the history of Islam in the Balkans and its role in the society.

3. Islam in the Balkans

Islamic religion is the main cultural reference of the Ottoman Empire. The historical process during the Ottoman domination in the Balkans has resulted in the consolidation of Islam among some

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[5] Except for the Party for Justice in Kosovo, an Islam-inspired party which only had a single Albanian deputy in Kosovo's former parliament. This party is no longer represented in the current parliament.
[6] On religion in Kosovo, see the report (ICG, 2001)
[7] Most of Macedonia's Albanian political elite was trained at the University of Pristina

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indigenous populations of the Balkans: majority of the Albanian population, the Bosnian Muslims, Pomaks (Slavic Islamized), but also part of the Vlach people, Goran (Muslim population of Macedonian language), Torbechis (Slavic-speaking Muslim community) and Romas (Gypsy). To these indigenous populations are added other Turkish and Circassian populations (populations from the Caucasus north-west) populations belong the Empire but exogene to the Empire. Today, there are about 58 million inhabitants in the Balkans (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Macedonia, Bulgaria, Serbia, Montenegro, Rumania, Croatia and Slovenia). Of those, more than eight million (14 percent) are thought to be of Muslim faith (Bugajski, 2000 : 2).[8]

3.1 The process of Islamization

Islam is an integral part of history in the Balkans. This is mainly due to the social structure of the Ottoman system. Islamization in the Balkans started progressively from the end of the Middle Age, initially in the cities. The process was voluntary, at least until the seventeenth century, when conversions accelerated, and continued until the nineteenth century. What took place was a policy of massive islamization of the populations in the Southern Balkans. It was carried out through socio-economic pressure, as non-Muslims were subjected to severe tax increases. Conversion was also a means of rising socially within the Ottoman administrative and political machinery. Finally, some very common Ottoman institutions also had a major impact, such as the *Janissaries*[9], but also the *sürgün* (displacement and collective conversion of Christian populations).[10] Similarly, semi-feudal local governors and the native converts have an influence on the spread of Islam.

The reasons for these conversions are subject to differing interpretations. Sometimes the focus is solely on political pressure, see the repression that Ottoman authorities have exercised for the convertion of these people and to their incorporation into the cultural unity of the empire. But experts say on the issue that people of Orthodox, Catholic or Jewish, which are territorially integrated within the empire, are part of the millet system (non-Muslim religious communities). Each millet must recognize the political authority of the Sultan. In return he is free to organize its way of religious life, culture and education. The perpetuation of this system of millets and hierarchies and internal structures of these religious communities are encouraged by the Porte. That said, the cultural homogeneity (Islamization of the Empire) is not an objective of the Ottoman Empire. The latter takes it as the model for managing cultural diversity and religious practiced by his predecessor, namely the Byzantine Empire.

However, conversions to Islam did not mean that the former religion was obliterated. For example, during the islamization of the Albanian cultural areas, dual religious practices emerged: the new Muslims kept on revering the Holy Mary and the Saints and going on a pilgrimage to the Holy Places. Vice versa, Christians went to the graves of Muslim saints in order to have their wishes fulfilled (Arnold, 1976: 183-184). New converts also kept on secretly adhering to Christianity, although their children tended to end up as real converts (Arnold, 1976 : 188; Malcolm, 1998 : 131-132). This phenomenon is known as crypto-Christianity (*laramanë* in Albanian).[11]

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[8] These are estimates made on the basis of 1991 statistics. On the ethno linguistic spread of Muslims in the Balkans, see: (Bougarel & Clayer, 2001)

[9] *Yennitcheri* : New troops. These were armies of slaves to the Sultan, made up of male Christian children who were picked up (*devşirme*) at a very young age. They were sent to Istanbul, converted to Islam, educated and trained, before being posted to different imperial provinces in the army or in the administration.

[10] On *millet* system, see: (Braude & Lewis, 1965)

[11] On *laramanë*, see the excellent contribution of Ger Duijzings, (Duijzings, 2000 : 86-105); As reminded by Stavrianos « The Albanians never have been fanatics in religious matters. Most Moslem Albanians belonged to the bektashi sect, an extremely

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Islam in the Balkans belongs to the Hanafite *madhhab* (school of law) of Sunni Islam.[12] Hanafism was the Ottoman Empire's official law school. It is characterized by its use of analogy and individual reason in order to solve legal or religious problems that were not tackled by the holy text, or *Sunna*.[13] This Islamic legal system, which was historically predominant, thus allowed taking into account popular customs in the religious practice. Islam in the Balkans also stands out because of its intrinsic plurality. In fact, during the final phase of Ottoman rule, the Balkans saw a proliferation of Sufi brotherhoods. These were minority trends of an Islam of mystical inspiration. Some of these brotherhoods were renowned for their complex symbiosis of practices and beliefs between Sunni and Shi'a Islam, or even between Islam and other religions.

The liberal and syncretistic spirit of some Sufi practices also partly explains why Christian populations converted to Islam during Ottoman rule in the Balkans.[14] Sufism developed in Albania[15], Macedonia, Kosovo, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Dobroudja (a region straddling today's Rumania and Bulgaria) and Greece (Ioannina).[16] The Sufi orders and ethno linguistic diversity strongly influenced the beliefs and popular expressions of Balkan's Islam (Balivet, 1992 : 10-20).

The idiosyncrasies of Balkan's Islam are not only due to its Ottoman origins (Hanefism), but also to its suddenly becoming a minority religion after the fall of the Ottoman empire. Indeed, this factor helps explain its pragmatism and its capacity to adapt to the majority Christian or secular (communist) political context.

In short, the long Ottoman rule, the historical development towards a minority political status and the communist past in the Balkans led, first, to Islam's somewhat minor role in the Balkans and, second, to the peculiar form taken by Islam as compared to practices in other Muslim countries. Additionally, Muslims in the Balkans belong to diverse national and linguistic groups, which also have different relationships with Islam and religion in general.

In addition to the specific nature of Islam related to its Ottoman origins (Hanafism), the context of transition from a majority to a minority due to the collapse of the Ottoman Empire is also an important factor to take into account to explain the pragmatism of Islam in the Balkans, namely its adaptability in a political context predominantly Christian or secular. Since the disintegration of the Ottoman Empire, the Muslim religious authorities in the Balkans are placed under the direct authority of the new emerging Balkan states. Therefore, the Islamic religious institutions must "adapt to their new minority status and, beyond, to modernize the state and society"..[17] This situation is associated with the introduction, in 1945, of the communist regimes in the region. They carry the dismantling of traditional religious institutions in Yugoslavia: abolish courts shariati, nationalization of Awqaf, closing most of the madrasas. [18]

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unorthodox and tolerant order that preached a pantheistic universalist creed. Moslems and Christian Albanians lived side by side for centuries, and, although quarrels between tribes and individuals were only too common, religion was rarely the issue in dispute. Tolerance went so far that members of the same family not infrequently professed different religions. More than one traveller reported that infants were both baptized as Christians and circumcised as Moslems, and that adults who had begun life in that fashion used two names, one Christian and the other Moslem, depending upon the circle in which they happened to be moving at the time », (Stavrianos, 1958: p. 500)

[12] In Arab countries, these schools are in the minority.

[13] The Sunna is a tradition based on the Prophet's words and actions.

[14] Sufi orders (*tarikats*) are themselves divided into Bektâchîs (Bektachism) and Halvetis (Halvetism)

[15] The religious actors who were close to the bektachî tarikat played a major part in the promotion of Albanian nationalism.

[16] See: (Hasluck, 1929; Birge, 1937 ; Clayer 1990)

[17] Xavier Bougarel (2005), p. 25.

[18] Xavier Bougarel (2005), p. 26.

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3.2 Islam and Islamic institutions in Former Yugoslavie

After the disintegration of the Ottoman Empire, the Muslim religious authorities in the Balkans were placed under the direct rule of the new Balkan states occupying these territories. Therefore, they had to adapt to their new minority political status and, beyond, to the modernization of the state and society.

Under Tito's Yugoslav regime, the Muslim religious sphere was managed and controlled through Yugoslavia's Islamic Community (*Islamska Zajednica*). This official authority effectively put the Muslim populations' spiritual life under the control of a single institution. This institution thus benefited from a monopoly that was legitimized by the regime. It set itself the task to impose its spiritual authority and to homogenize Muslim religious life by erasing its plurality. This policy explains why Sufi orders had their activities banned in 1952.

While the Islamic religious sphere was being centralized, the secularization and modernization taking place during socialist Yugoslavia relegated religion and religious actors to the background. From the 1960s, important integration and modernization policies were implemented in some Muslim populated areas of former Yugoslavia. This led to these populations' rapid emancipation and secularization. The process gave birth to an atheistic political and intellectual elite, as well as to a radical marginalization of the Muslim religious clergy and of the customary traditional institutions. Atheism did not win over the sole elite, but also the major part of the population and in particular the urban population.[19] Islam was thus reduced to the private sphere: worship practices, annual religious feasts, traditional ceremonies for weddings, deaths etc.

Islam of the Balkans does not differ from the Islamic religious dogma. But the Communist past in the Balkan region has determined somewhat the marginal role of Islam in society and has fashioned an original relationship with that religion in comparison with other Muslim countries in the world. In addition, the Muslims of the Balkans are not a homogenous ethno-linguistic point of view and they do not maintain the same relations with Islam.

As a first synthesis, it must be admitted that the relationship between national identity and religious identity among Muslim populations of the Balkans is historically and geographically diverse. What about the current situation? What is the evolution of religion since the end of the devastating conflict that this region of Europe has known for over a decade? The next chapter will attempt to answer these questions.

4. Political and religious evolutions in the Former Yugoslavia since the 1990: the Albanian case

The end of the communist regime and of the wars in the Albanian populated areas in former Yugoslavia have allowed Islamic religious institutions to come back into the public sphere. There has been a religious revival and comeback of the Islamic religion's practice in these areas. However, these changes have followed a somewhat logic route, for countries in a post communist and post conflict situation. Additionally, these practices have not challenged the liberal tradition of Islam, its tolerance and cultural and political modernity.

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[19] This also explains the urban elites' religious mix.

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However, simultaneously, there have also been signs pointing towards symbolical changes in the link between national identity and religion. A debate has started on the role of Islam within Albanian society. And new politico-religious groups under Arab influence have made their appearance.

4.1 A new debate on the role of Islam within the Albanian society

Debates on the role of Islam in Albanian history have recently come to the fore. Given the secular position of the political and intellectual Albanian elites in relation to national identity, the emphasis has been put on the necessity to « rebalance » the place of the Muslim religion in the Albanian national endeavor. Some pious intellectual figures advocate rehabilitating Ottoman history and some Muslim Albanian historical figures, in official national history.[20] According to them, the Muslim religious dimension has been excluded from contemporary nationalist iconography, which was built up in opposition to Ottoman rule.

These debates have been relayed by media close to Islamist circles under Turkish, and Arab, influence. They emphasize the fact that Albanian elites tend not to accept their belonging to the Islamic religion. Moreover, they denounce intolerance towards wearing the veil in schools or public administration. They advocate the adoption of legal frameworks that would allow giving religion lessons in schools. And they demand the right to build mosques (Iseni, 2005a). The purpose of these arguments is to set the terms of the debate in favor of Islam in these mainly Muslim societies, even if their re-Islamization seems very unlikely.

A bitter debate even opposed the Albanian writer Ismaïl Kadaré to the Kosovar intellectual Rexhep Qosja (Kadare, 2006; Qosja, 2006). Qosja, who is an open atheist, criticized the political and intellectual elites for trying to promote Albania's European identity by emphasizing Catholic historical values and having an anti-Muslim discourse. In fact, for Qosja, Albanians have three denominations and this religious plurality is an enriching aspect of Albanian national identity. This identity would be weakened if a particular religion was favored by political and state institutions, as is often the case. For Kadaré, who has a pro-Christian political position, Albanians' place is in Europe, not in the East. It is revealing that Qosja has been criticized for his stand, whilst Ismaïl Kadaré's vision is largely shared among the elites in Kosovo and the other Albanian areas in the Balkans. The fact that political circles do not have any relationship with the Arabian-Muslim world is also proof of the western values it seeks to defend. These positions reflect the Albanians' complex towards their Islamic religious belonging, but also fear towards Islamist stigmatization and the consequences it could have on the Albanian political aspirations. They may also be a reaction to the recurrent Serbian and Macedonian propaganda on the «Islamist threat» potentially represented by the Albanian population for the Balkans and more widely for Europe.

Whether in Albania, Kosovo, Macedonia, Southern Serbia or Montenegro, most of the political and intellectual Albanian elite today looks towards the cultural and political western model and secularism. This positioning is clear in the program and discourse of the political parties, all of which in favor of integrating the Balkan countries into the Euro-Atlantic political and military structures. As for intellectuals, they have a clear propensity to minimize the historical dynamics influenced by the eastern world.[21]

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[20] See for example: http//:www.gazetajava.com; http://www.gazetabesa.com.
[21] Some young researchers are very critical of Orientalism in the Albanian thought and literature (Sulstarova, 2006)

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4.2 The appearance of neo-Salafist politico-religious groups

Since the end of the communist regime in the Balkans, new politico-religious trends have appeared: neo-Salafist Islamic fundamentalist groups of the pietistic and jihadist variety. They infiltrated Balkan countries notably through faith-based humanitarian organizations (FBHO). These groups, which are commonly described as « Wahhabist », have gained some ground in the Balkans.[22] Macedonia was one of the first countries where these ideological movements were able to take root. Even though they were driven away by the Macedonian Government, they were able to establish staging posts, with local actors promoting their politico-religious activities. These FBOH also penetrated Kosovo during the 1999 war, in order to provide humanitarian assistance to Kosovar refugees and to respond to their massive material needs after they returned. Alongside their humanitarian activities, these FBOH also proselytize in the towns and villages. Isa Blumi made the International Community present in Kosovo (United Nations Mission in Kosovo-UNMIK) responsible for allowing these organizations to establish themselves. According to him, their « humanitarian » activities in the villages even suited the UNMIK, which was not able to help them all (Blumi, 2003). There are hardly any FBOH in the Presevo Valley.

These politico-religious movements appear to have important financial resources from the Gulf States at their disposal. They have several objectives: to control the population's spiritual life, to politicize Islam and to encourage intolerance towards secularism and religious plurality in the Balkan states. More concretely, they aim to transform the Albanians' traditional (i.e. cultural) relationship to religion and to introduce a political and conservative Islam. The preachers who are close to these politico-religious groups advocate returning to an Islam that would have been cleansed of the six century long Ottoman heritage and abandoning the plural and liberal practice of Albanian Islam. This also explains why the FBHU have been destroying mosques with an Ottoman architecture in order to « restore » them. This vision of Islam, which is in the minority, seeks to strengthen the intra-Albanian Muslim solidarity in order to weaken the Albanian national feeling that is dominant in Kosovo and Macedonia and that is based on language and a pro-western attitude.

The neo-Salafist groupings only have a limited sphere of activity, compared to Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Sandjak. But their politico-religious doctrine clearly aims to produce effects in the middle or possibly the long term. They have encouraged the training of young Albanian imams in the neo-Salafist spirit in Saudi Universities (notably the Medina). They also translated into Albanian religious books that are close to their movement and are circulating them for free. These represent substantial investments, which clearly aim to change the perception of Islam in the Albanian community. Eventually, they also aim to control Islamic institutions in Kosovo and Macedonia. This new Salafist challenge and its progressive strengthening in the Albanian areas were even denounced publicly by Albanian religious figures (Idrizi, 2005). This phenomenon seems to be a cause of serious worry for the Albanian political community, as well as for the Islamic religious institutions, which are afraid of being infiltrated by imams close to that movement. In 2003, Kosovo's former mufti publicly denounced this phenomenon, which is exogenous to the region's Islamic tradition: « There are people who come here and want to tell us how we ought to do things. We have been Muslims for more than 600 years and we do not need to be told what Islam is. We have our own history and tradition here, our own Islamic culture and architecture. We would like to rebuild our community and to rebuild our mosques, but we want to do it in our way » (Schwartz, 2002: 4).

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[22] For conceptual clarification of the different Islamic and Islamist politico religious movements under foreign influence in the Balkans , see : (Iseni & Bougarel, 2007)

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In Kosovo, the strong mobilization for independence of the Albanian population and the political and intellectual elite has clearly marginalized the question of religion's place in society, particularly that of Islam. The new Kosovo Constitution strongly asserts the principle of secularism, the values of democracy and ethnic pluralism in Kosovo. However, the Kosovar leadership will sooner or later have to confront Kosovo's sociological reality and the burning issues relating to religion and Islam. In a way similar to the western democracies, it will have to regulate the question of religious liberties and the status of religious institutions, particularly the KIC, which actually has a liberal politico religious position. In fact, the lack of discussion on Islamic religious issues has been largely exploited by Islamist-leaning religious circles, who criticize the atheist attitude of the political elite and institutions. It appears that there is some confusion in Kosovo around the notion of secularism, which is often mixed up with the lack of any religion.

The ongoing settlement of Kosovo's political status and the western powers' commitment to recognize it as an independent state have supported the current Kosovar political elite, which is unambiguously in favor of western values. Concretely, the western states' position has cut the ground from under the neo-Salafist fundamentalist circles and their anti-modern, anti-western discourse. The « settlement » of Kosovo's statute has also allowed venting the frustrations of the Kosovar population, which had been fighting for independence for many years. However, in the middle term, the difficult socio-economic context, which affects large swathes of the population, might clear the ground for circles close to the Islamist and fundamentalist formations. And some traditional political groups might also be tempted to court Kosovo's Islamic religious institutions, in the electoral partisan game.

In Macedonia, the leaders of the Albanian population are still mobilized around its collective political status. All of the Albanian political formations keep referring to the implementation of the Ohrid Agreements in favor of Albanians' national rights. Some key points relating to Albanians' minority rights, for example the status of the Albanian language, have failed to materialize. Frustrations have paved the way for new secular political formations. The attitude of the Islamic Community of Macedonia is more ambiguous, as it is torn between the influences of different Albanian political formations, though for opportunistic and electoral reasons, rather than for politico-religious ones (Iseni & Bougarel, 2007 : 23-33). Some Slav-Macedonian political formations (notably the VMRO-DPMNE: Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization–Democratic Party of the Macedonian National Unity) have adopted Orthodox politico-religious positions, which could also contribute to the politicization of Islam in Macedonia.

Finally, in the Presevo Valley, the Islamic community and the Albanian population in the Presevo Valley may find themselves caught up in the geopolitical changes that could take place with the settlement of Kosovo's status. This might prompt the Albanian political formations to use the Presevo Islamic Community for their different political plans.

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